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United Nations

Committee on Information

Report on the twenty-sixth session (26 April-7 May 2004)

General Assembly

Official Records
Fifty-ninth Session
Supplement No. 21 (A/59/21)

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Note

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Chapter I

Introduction

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In section I, paragraph 2, of its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly",

and requested the Committee on Information and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly, in its resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the report of the Committee and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group,[1] reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in Assembly resolution 34/182 and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67. The Committee on Information agreed, at its organizational session in 1980, that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to fifty-first sessions (see resolutions 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162 A and B, 43/60 A and B, 44/50, 45/76 A and B, 46/73 B, 47/73 B, 48/44 B, 49/38 B, 50/31 B and 51/138 B), the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the reports of the Committee[2] and its recommendations and reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in its resolution 34/182. At its fifty-second session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[3] and adopted consensus resolutions 52/70 A and B of 10 December 1997. At its fifty-third session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[4] and adopted consensus resolutions 53/59 A and B of 3 December 1998. At its fifty-fourth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[5] and adopted consensus resolutions 54/82 A and B of 6 December 1999. At its fifty-fifth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[6] and adopted consensus resolutions 55/136 A and B of 8 December 2000. At its fifty-sixth session, the

Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[7] and adopted consensus resolutions 56/64 A of 10 December 2001 and 56/64 B of 24 December 2001. At its fifty-seventh session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[8] and adopted consensus resolutions 57/130 A and B of 11 December 2002. At its fifty-eighth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[9] and adopted consensus resolutions 58/101 A and B of 9 December 2003.

4. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely, China and Mexico; at its forty-first session, the Assembly appointed Malta as a new member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, the Assembly appointed Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe as new members of the Committee; and at its forty-fourth session, the Assembly appointed Nepal as a new member.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee on Information, to increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78 and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay as members. The Assembly also decided to appoint the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as a member of the Committee, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 78 to 79 and appointed Burkina Faso as a member.

7. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 79 to 81 and appointed the Republic of Korea and Senegal as members.

8. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 81 to 83 and appointed Gabon and Israel as members.

9. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 83 to 88 and appointed Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan and South Africa as members.

10. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 88 to 89 and appointed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a member.

11. At its fifty-second session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 89 to 90 and appointed Georgia as a member.

12. At its fifty-third session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 90

to 93 and appointed Angola, the Republic of Moldova and Solomon Islands as members.

13. At its fifty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 93 to 95 and appointed Liberia and Mozambique as members of the Committee.

14. At its fifty-fifth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 95 to 97 and appointed Armenia and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya as members of the Committee. Furthermore, the admission of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to membership in the United Nations, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 55/12 of 1 November 2000, terminated the membership of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in all organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations, including the Committee on Information.

15. At its fifty-sixth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 96 to 98 and appointed Azerbaijan and Monaco as members.

16. At its fifty-seventh session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 98 to 99 and appointed Saudi Arabia as a member.

17. At its fifty-eighth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 99 to 102 and appointed Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Switzerland as members.

18. The Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria
Angola
Argentina
Armenia
Azerbaijan
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France

Gabon
Georgia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Liberia
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
Malta
Mexico
Monaco
Mongolia
Morocco
Mozambique
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Republic of Moldova
Romania
Russian Federation
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Singapore
Slovakia
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Suriname
Switzerland
Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Zimbabwe

Chapter II
Organizational questions

A. Opening of the session

19. The organizational meeting of the twenty-sixth session of the Committee on Information was held on 26 April 2004 at United Nations Headquarters. The session was opened by the Chairman of the Committee, Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury (Bangladesh).

B. Election of officers

20. Following an oral amendment by the Chairman to the provisional agenda, the Committee decided to include "Election of officers" as one of the agenda items. Although the Bureau was elected for a two-year term at its twenty-fifth session, Larbi Djacta (Algeria) made a request to withdraw from the Bureau. Kais Kabtani (Tunisia) was nominated by the African Group to serve as a Vice-Chairman in place of Mr. Djacta. The officers of the Committee on Information for the period 2003-2004 are thus as follows:

Chairman:
Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury (Bangladesh)

Vice-Chairmen:
Sebastião Filipe Coelho Ferreira (Portugal)
Marius Ioan Dragolea (Romania)
Kais Kabtani (Tunisia)

Rapporteur:
Janice Miller (Jamaica)

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

21. At its organizational meeting, the Committee adopted the following agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/2004/1):

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
4. Admission of new members.
5. Statement by the Chairman.
6. Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.
7. General debate and consideration of substantive questions.
8. Open-ended working group of the Committee on Information.
9. Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day.
10. Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

22. The Committee held the substantive meetings of its twenty-sixth session at United Nations Headquarters from 26 April to 7 May 2004.

23. For its consideration of agenda item 7, the Committee had before it the following reports of the Secretary-General:

(a) Report of the Secretary-General on the continuing reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/2004/2);

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/2004/3);

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on the modernization and integrated management of United Nations libraries and in-depth review of library activities (A/AC.198/2004/4);

(d) Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Communications Group in 2003 (A/AC.198/2004/5);

(e) Report of the Secretary-General on better publicizing the work and decisions of the General Assembly (A/AC.198/2004/6);

(f) Note by the Secretary-General on the proposed strategic framework for the period 2006-2007 (A/AC.198/2004/7).

D. Observers

24. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Bahamas, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, the Dominican Republic, Iceland, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Nauru, Panama, Paraguay, Qatar, Rwanda, Samoa and Uganda. The Holy See also participated as an observer.

25. Representatives of the following specialized agencies also participated as observers: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization. The African Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie also participated as observers.

E. Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day

26. On 3 May, the Committee observed World Press Freedom Day 2004 with an event organized by the Department of Public Information. The Secretary-General opened the meeting, which was also addressed by the Chairman of the Committee on Information, the Director, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Liaison Office in New York, and the President of the United Nations Correspondents Association. A number of distinguished print and broadcast journalists took part in a panel discussion on the theme "Reporting and under-reporting: who decides?", which was moderated by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.

Chapter III
General debate

27. Statements in the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee on Information: Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil (first on behalf of the Rio Group and again on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-speaking countries), Burkina Faso, Colombia, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland (on behalf of the European Union), Israel, Jamaica (on behalf of the Caribbean Community), Japan, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Romania, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Republic of Tanzania, the United States of America, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Ukraine, Venezuela and Yemen. Statements were also made by two observers: Cape Verde and Qatar (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China).

28. The general debate was preceded by statements made by the Chairman of the Committee and the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Department of Public Information.

29. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, most speakers emphasized the central role of the United Nations in global affairs and of the Department of Public Information as its public voice. One speaker, speaking on behalf of a large group, noted that the Department assumed the important task of projecting the image of the United Nations to the public, of explaining its role and showing the impact of its actions. The challenge for the Department, he emphasized, was not only to ensure a wider outreach of communications strategies, but also to contribute to the concretization of the goals and objectives of the United Nations as set out in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the medium-term plan. The work of the Department would therefore be guided towards achieving those goals and objectives, in particular, to promote priority development issues, such as poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS, dialogue among civilizations and cultures, sustainable development and the needs of African countries.

30. Another speaker, pointing out the important role the Department played in promoting the broader goals of the Organization, said that in today's "monopolized world of media", it was crucial in bringing accurate information to the attention of people worldwide. Another speaker, who described the Department of Public Information as a conduit for the flow of information between the United Nations and people of the world, said that by combating biased information of all kinds in the world's communication matrix, the Department could lead the march towards harmony within its own sphere of influence — the domain of information. Another speaker, calling upon the Department to maintain its focus on areas of specific interest for developing countries and countries with economies in transition, asked to publicize the results of the Chernobyl disaster.

31. Several speakers said they attached great importance to the commemoration of World Press Freedom Day, which in 2004 was observed at United Nations Headquarters on 3 May. One speaker, speaking on behalf of a large group, reiterated her commitment to a free press and its important role in a free society. She regretted that in many countries press freedom did not exist and the dissemination of information was controlled and limited. She reminded the Committee that freedom

of opinion and expression was a right set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In that context, she recalled that the Department had renamed its training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries in honour of Reham al-Farra, a Department of Public Information staff member who had been killed along with 21 others in the attack on United Nations headquarters in Baghdad in 2003. Her death, and the loss of so many other talented media personnel and journalists, was a sobering reminder of the cost of freedom of expression, she underlined.

32. A number of speakers commended the Department for implementing its annual training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries, which contributed to the promotion of capacity-building in developing countries as well as in countries in transition. One speaker referred to the International Programme for the Development of Communication of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which was designed to strengthen the communication capacities of developing countries, and requested UNESCO to submit a report to the Committee at its next session. He also congratulated the United Nations Correspondents Association for its Dag Hammarskjöld Memorial Scholarship Fund and encouraged the Department to extend support to the Fund to enable it to double the number of scholarships to journalists from the developing countries.

33. Another speaker noted that one of the indispensable conditions for information to play its role in society was freedom of expression, which was essential for the consolidation of a new world information order. It was regrettable that in exercising that basic freedom, some excesses had been committed. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press should be exercised with total responsibility and in a constructive spirit, the speaker stressed.

34. Several speakers referred to the role of the Committee on Information vis-à-vis the Department of Public Information and emphasized the importance of constructive interaction between them. According to one speaker, who spoke on behalf of a large group, that engagement was essential to ensure that the shared objectives of providing quality and focused information services to the United Nations family and to the wider public were met. One speaker, recalling that the Committee on Information had been established as the forum to formulate a cogent and coherent information policy for the world which could bring about harmony, goodwill and greater understanding among peoples by building bridges between various societies, cultures, religions and regions, regretted that the Committee had little gains and few achievements to report. The story of dwindling understanding between religions, cultures and ideologies reflected a less than optimistic picture, he underlined.

35. Referring to the growing digital divide between developed and developing countries, several speakers called for greater efforts by the international community and the Department of Public Information to close that gap. One speaker commented that, as a result of the inequality in the use of information and communications technologies, the disparity between the developed and the developing countries in the field of public information had widened. Certain countries continued to take advantage of those imbalances and had encroached on the sovereignty and interests of other countries. Some countries were taking advantage of their monopoly of modern communications to distort the reality of the developing countries.

36. A number of speakers discussed the outcome of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva in December 2003, and referred to the second phase of the Summit, to be held in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005. Welcoming the holding of the Geneva phase of the Summit, a number of speakers said the Tunis phase should come up with concrete initiatives at all levels to bridge the digital divide and to place information and communications technologies at the service of development. They called upon the Department of Public Information to contribute to raising the international community's awareness of the Summit's importance and the need to join efforts to make it a success. Another speaker, expressing similar views, noted that the digital divide could only be closed with the presence of the requisite political will, which was referred to in Africa as "digital solidarity". She hoped that the Tunis phase of the World Summit would be able to make a major contribution to promoting access to technology for all.

37. One speaker, addressing the Committee on behalf of a large group, referred to the Secretary-General's report on the continuing reorientation of the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/2004/2) and expressed her group's satisfaction with the process of reorientation set out in the report. Welcoming the broad-based restructuring that had been implemented, she noted that, with a new organizational structure, mission statement and operating model, the Department had the tools it needed to carry out its activities in a focused and effective manner. She also welcomed the Department's new strategic direction, which included a new client-oriented approach, greater system-wide coordination and the embedding of a culture of evaluation into its work.

38. Another speaker commended the Department for doing a good job, often under difficult circumstances during the last year. He noted with satisfaction that the Department had made progress in implementing its reforms, notably its new client-oriented approach. That positive approach must allow for the establishment of closer ties between the public and the Organization by making its actions and policies more comprehensible. A number of speakers commended the Department for reaching out to targeted audiences, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), research institutions, libraries and academic institutions. Another speaker urged the Department to focus on further reinforcing partnerships with Governments, as well as on building bridges with civil society and NGOs.

39. Speaking on behalf of a large group, another speaker welcomed the progress achieved by the Department since the commencement of the reorientation exercise in enhancing the performance and effectiveness of the Department in accordance with the mandate established by the General Assembly and the recommendations of the Committee on Information. The restructuring of the Department had added impetus to the work of the Department and had resulted in the delivery of targeted and focused information on the United Nations, noted another speaker, who also spoke on behalf of a large group. The adoption of a client-oriented approach in the Department's interaction with other Secretariat departments was commended by one speaker, who noted his particular appreciation for the fact that the Department had already established formal relationships with 24 client departments and that 30 communications strategies had been concluded with them.

40. Referring to the new culture of evaluation adopted by the Department, one speaker welcomed the completion of the first annual programme impact review and

the formulation of 170 performance indicators, which would enable programme managers to assess their activities. Another speaker, while welcoming the continuing promotion and refinement of a culture of evaluation and performance management, cautioned that data collection, valuable as it was to any evaluation exercise, could not be the only index of performance management. There must be simultaneous emphasis on data analysis and possible adaptation of that analysis to improve the system. He also observed that the emphasis on data collection should not be to the detriment of the day-to-day work of programme managers.

41. Several delegations, focusing on the activities of the report of the Secretary-General on the modernization and integrated management of United Nations libraries (A/AC.198/2004/4), praised the efforts of the Department to improve the services of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and its depository libraries. The training programmes for the librarians of United Nations depository libraries to enhance their capacity for information management and development was also highlighted by a speaker. Concerning the modernization and integrated management of libraries, one speaker took note of the results of the work carried out by the Steering Committee established to follow the question. They constituted a good basis for the realization of the goal of improving the efficiency of the United Nations library system. Another speaker noted that, as the Steering Committee had completed its organizational phase, he looked forward to the achievement of concrete results that would enable United Nations system libraries to meet the needs of their diverse clientele more efficiently.

42. A number of delegates referred to the report of the Secretary-General on better publicizing the work and decisions of the General Assembly (A/AC.198/2004/6). Welcoming the recommendations contained in the report to publicize the work and decisions of the Assembly, one speaker encouraged the Department to establish a working relationship with the Office of the General Assembly President. Another speaker, echoing those views, said a better dissemination of the work and decisions of the General Assembly was imperative and elaborating a communications strategy to do so would be a positive development. Another speaker, speaking on behalf of a large group, also commended the Department's efforts to publicize the work and decisions of the General Assembly more effectively, but added that further efforts were required to make the Assembly's work more visible to the wider public. That could best be assisted through the adoption of an approach which made the Assembly's work more attractive and accessible. Such an approach, he asserted, might need to be augmented by the requisite human and financial resources, including the placement of the necessary staff in the Office of the President of the Assembly.

43. Several speakers singled out the United Nations web site as an effective medium for the dissemination of information about the United Nations. One speaker, representing a large group, noted that the web site continued to register an increasing number of hits, which was a reflection of the relevance of the work of the United Nations and the wide public interest in its activities across the globe. She welcomed the efforts of the Department to make the web site more relevant through the use of innovations, such as live webcasts of important debates and meetings. Another speaker, also representing a large group, while expressing support and appreciation for the Department's work to strengthen the United Nations web site in all official languages, expressed concern at the "increasing gap" among web sites in different official languages. More resources should be allocated to achieve equality

among all official languages and he urged that, in order to bridge the current gap, the Department should take into account the specificity of some languages which used non-Latin and bidirectional scripts. Another speaker, referring to the continuing imbalance in the capacities of the web site in the different languages, cited the example of the Arabic site, which required further improvement so that it might satisfy the needs of Arabic-speaking visitors.

44. However, presenting a different view, another speaker underlined that, in the light of its limited resources, the Department would not be able to undertake all of the proposed improvements to the web site simultaneously. The Department should therefore give greater priority to deepening and enlarging the capacity of the web site in those major languages that currently received the most traffic. Another speaker, while commending the Department for endeavouring to achieve parity in the use of the six official languages on the United Nations web site, especially the enhancement of the multilingual News Centre web portal and its efforts to expand its capacity to provide webcasts in official languages, argued that multilingualism, as defined in that context, did not equate with universality. The six official languages, for example, were spoken by approximately 40 per cent of first-language speakers worldwide. Considering that the Official Document System was expected to be made freely available to the public during the fourth quarter of 2004 through its integration with the United Nations web site, he questioned whether the use of human and financial resources to try to achieve language parity on the web site was justified in the light of the other priorities of the Organization.

45. Several speakers argued that in spite of increasing technological progress, the traditional means of communication, such as radio, remained vital, particularly in developing countries, where access to more advanced forms of communication was still far from satisfactory. Describing radio as the cheapest and the most accessible means of communication in his subregion, one speaker urged that necessary funds be made available to the Department to sustain the live radio project, which had been made an integral part of the Department's activities. Another speaker, referring to the importance of radio for the least developed Portuguese-speaking countries, asked the Department to strengthen the Portuguese Unit of United Nations Radio.

46. A number of speakers cited the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Communications Group (A/AC.198/2004/5) and commended the Department for its leadership role within the Group. One speaker, citing an example of the successful proactive efforts of the Group, noted its coordinated efforts to promote greater interest in and awareness of issues concerning African development, including the information provided on the Third Tokyo International Conference on African Development. He also noted with appreciation the involvement of the Group in drawing greater public awareness to Expo 2005, Aichi, Japan, for which the Group had formed a consultative group. Another speaker suggested the formation of a regional component of the Communications Group, which he argued would help reach out to various national audiences.

47. Several speakers discussed the vital links between public information and the United Nations peacekeeping operations. One speaker, representing a large group of countries, welcomed the efforts of the Department to develop a strategy to publicize new peacekeeping missions, particularly in Africa. Saying that United Nations peacekeeping operations had assumed paramount importance against the backdrop of an international era beset with conflict, another speaker said information

components of peacekeeping operations had a vital role to play in forging proper understanding of the mission's objectives and capabilities. The Department should continue its efforts to strengthen its capacity through the development of a coherent information strategy with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Two other speakers, addressing the Committee on behalf of two large groups, expressed concern over a certain gap that existed between public perceptions about peacekeeping operations and the current reality and argued that the preparation and dissemination of a message on United Nations peacekeeping operations must be part of the Department's priorities. Another speaker emphasized that there was a greater need than ever to develop a comprehensive public information strategy on peacekeeping operations to ensure the greatest public impact.

48. The report of the Secretary-General on the rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/2004/3) drew the attention of most speakers. One speaker, who described the establishment in Brussels on 30 January 2004 of the regional United Nations information centre, which was part of the Secretary-General's rationalization process, as being of particular significance to the members of the group of countries she represented, welcomed the proposed model for regionalization of United Nations information centres. Another speaker noted that, following the first phase of establishing the Brussels regional centre, it was now necessary to move into the second phase -- to channel all the resources saved from the closing down of nine national centres to support the information activities of the United Nations in developing countries. Another speaker, saying that the Secretary-General, in his report submitted for consideration by the Committee, had convincingly explained the need to reorganize the information centre system, urged that the hands of the Secretariat should not be tied; rather, countries should work with it to effect the long-overdue reorganization.

49. Several other speakers presented views on the rationalization process. Some delegates stressed that a single model could not be applied to all countries and that it was important to ascertain the impact of the newly created Western European hub in Brussels before proceeding with the process in developing countries. While welcoming the establishment of the regional hub in Brussels, several delegates emphasized that the case of developing countries should be viewed from a different perspective and that their geographical and linguistic differences, as well as the existing technology and infrastructure gap, should be taken into consideration before applying such a model. One speaker, representing a large group, observed that it was premature to present proposals on further regionalization. The United Nations information centres played a significant role in disseminating information and in promoting public awareness of and mobilizing support for the Organization's work. Enough time should be given to examine the results and possible added value of the creation of the Western European hub before presenting any new proposals, which should take into account, among other things, the existing differences in information technology and communications between Western Europe and other regions of the developing world. He emphasized the need to allocate adequate resources for the effective functioning and strengthening of the United Nations information centres in developing countries.

50. One speaker, arguing for maintaining the information centre in the country he represented, wondered if it was logical to close information centres at a time when the Organization was being misunderstood. Another speaker noted that the performance and efficiency of United Nations information centres should be

maximized by closer supervision and better coordination. In that context, he argued that if any information centre failed to perform at the optimum level, the solution was not to eliminate it but to identify the problems afflicting it. Another speaker cautioned that reform of the Department and rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres should not be implemented simply for the purpose of achieving budget savings for the Department. Another speaker, citing the example of the information centre hosted by his country, said that given the fact that developing countries were lagging behind in access to information technology, the closure of the centre there would only deepen the lack of information about the United Nations in the subregion his country belonged to. Saying that his Government had provided the centre with premises free of charge, partly paid its telephone bills and fully covered its water and electricity bills, he argued that the centre's overall cost was almost insignificant compared to the activities it carried out. Expressing similar views, another speaker urged caution before applying the idea of establishing regional hubs. Due consideration should be accorded to the specific needs of different countries, particularly in countries with underdeveloped communication infrastructure and systems. Otherwise, those changes would jeopardize the objectives of the Committee and the mandate of the Department. Several other speakers referred to the costs shared by their Governments in hosting United Nations information centres in their countries and highlighted the advantages of United Nations information centres in their own countries and in countries they served.

51. Another speaker, referring to the report of the Secretary-General on the rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres, wanted to know why certain Member States had been excluded from their services. He was not fully persuaded by the proposals of the Department of Public Information regarding the regionalization plan for United Nations information centres. That discussion and the establishment of regional hubs should take into account the needs of each region. A regional hub was rendered irrelevant if it only covered one Member State. Another speaker, arguing that United Nations information centres carried symbolic value at the national level, spoke against closing down any of the existing centres without a proper assessment of the specific needs and conditions of each centre. He also stated that the Department could benefit more if the centre in his country could be upgraded and strengthened.

52. The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information provided an in-depth response to a wide range of questions raised by delegations during the general debate, on 29 April 2004.

Chapter IV
Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session

53. At its fifth plenary meeting, the Committee proceeded to adopt by consensus the draft report, including the following two draft resolutions and draft decision:

Draft resolution A
Information in the service of humanity

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information,[10]

Also taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information,[11]

Urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources and their free access to information, and recognizing the call in this context for what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed "a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process":

(a) To cooperate and interact with a view to reducing existing disparities in information flows at all levels by increasing assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by those countries, and in order to enable them and the public, private or other media in developing countries to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and increase the participation of media and individuals in the communication process, and to ensure a free flow of information at all levels;

(b) To ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them;

(c) To provide support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from public, private and other media in developing countries;

(d) To enhance regional efforts and cooperation among developing countries, as well as cooperation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information;

(e) To aim at, in addition to bilateral cooperation, providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and their media, public, private or other, with due regard to their interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including:

(i) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(ii) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and their media, public, private or other, to have, by using their national and regional resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(iii) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(iv) The facilitation, as appropriate, of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market;

(f) To provide full support for the International Programme for the Development of Communication[12] of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media.

Draft resolution B
United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Reiterating its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee on Information as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations to it relating to the work of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat,

Concurring with the view of the Secretary-General that the fundamental premise underlying the reorientation efforts of the Department of Public Information remains General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, establishing the Department, which states in paragraph 2 of annex I that "the activities of the Department should be so organized and directed as to promote to the greatest possible extent an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations among the peoples of the world",

Concurring also with the view of the Secretary-General that the contents of public information and communications should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations and that a culture of communications should permeate all levels of the Organization, as a means of fully informing the peoples of the world of the aims and activities of the United Nations, in accordance with the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, in order to create broad-based global support for the United Nations,

Stressing that the primary mission of the Department of Public Information is to provide, through its outreach activities, accurate, impartial, comprehensive and timely information to the public on the tasks and responsibilities of the United Nations in order to strengthen international support for the activities of the Organization with the greatest transparency,

Noting that the comprehensive review of the work of the Department of Public Information, requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001, and the implementation of its second phase, described in the report of the Secretary-General on reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fifth session,[13] as well as the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change",[14] and its resolutions 57/300 of 20 December 2002 and 58/101 B of 9 December 2003, as they apply to the Department of Public Information, provide an opportunity to take further steps to rationalize the work of the Department in order to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness, and to maximize the use of its resources,

Expressing its concern that the gap in the information and communication technologies between the developed and the developing countries has continued to widen and that vast segments of the population in developing countries are not benefiting from the present information and technology revolution, and, in this regard, underlining the necessity of rectifying the imbalances of the global information and technology revolution in order to make it more just, equitable and effective,

Recognizing that developments in the information and communication technology revolution open vast new opportunities for economic growth and social development and can play an important role in the eradication of poverty in developing countries, and, at the same time, emphasizing that it also poses challenges and risks and could lead to the further widening of disparities between and within countries,

Recalling its resolution 56/262 of 15 February 2002 on multilingualism, and emphasizing the importance of making appropriate use of the official languages of the United Nations in the activities of the Department of Public Information, aiming to eliminate the disparity between the use of English and the five other official languages,

Welcoming Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Switzerland to membership in the Committee on Information,

I. Introduction

1. *Reaffirms* its resolution 13 (I), in which it established the Department of Public Information, and all other relevant General Assembly resolutions related to the activities of the Department;

2. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General, in respect of the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, to continue to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 2 of its resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993 and other mandates as established by the General Assembly;

3. *Notes* that the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005[15] continues to serve as a guideline that sets out the overall orientation of the public information programme for the Organization's goals through effective communication, and recalls its resolution 58/269 of 23 December 2003, entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change", in which it requested the Secretary-General to prepare, on a trial basis, for submission to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, a strategic framework to replace the current four-year medium-term plan;

4. *Reaffirms* that the United Nations remains the indispensable foundation of a peaceful and just world and that its voice must be heard in a clear and effective manner, and emphasizes the essential role of the Department of Public Information in this context;

5. *Stresses* the importance of clear and timely provision of information by the Secretariat to Member States, upon their request, within the framework of existing mandates and procedures, and encourages the Department of Public Information to continue to do so;

6. *Reaffirms* the central role of the Committee on Information in United Nations public information policies and activities, including the restructuring process of the Department of Public Information, and the prioritization of its activities, and welcomes the continued constructive interaction between the Department and the members of the Committee;

7. *Calls upon* Member States to ensure, to the extent possible, that recommendations relating to the programme of the Department of Public Information originate and are considered in the Committee on Information;

8. *Requests* the Department of Public Information, following the priorities laid down by the General Assembly in the medium-term plan and using the United Nations Millennium Declaration[16] as its guide, to pay particular attention to such major issues as the eradication of poverty, conflict prevention, sustainable development, human rights, the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) epidemic, combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and the needs of the African continent;

9. *Also requests* the Department of Public Information to pay attention to all major issues addressed in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals in carrying out its activities;

10. *Concurs* with the Secretary-General on the need to enhance the technological infrastructure of the Department of Public Information in order to widen its outreach and improve the United Nations web site;

11. *Recognizes* the important work carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and its collaboration with news agencies and broadcasting organizations in developing countries in disseminating information on priority issues, and encourages a continued collaboration between the Department of Public Information and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in the promotion of culture and in the fields of education and communication;

II. General activities of the Department of Public Information

12. *Notes* the proposals and actions of the Secretary-General to improve the effective and targeted delivery of public information activities, including the restructuring of the Department of Public Information, in accordance with the relevant resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information in this regard at its twenty-seventh session;

13. *Reaffirms* that the Department of Public Information is the focal point for information policies of the United Nations and the primary news centre for information about the United Nations, its activities and those of the Secretary-General, and encourages a closer integration of functions between the Department and the office providing spokesman services for the Secretary-General;

14. *Welcomes* the recommendations of the Department of Public Information for developing a communications strategy on publicizing the work and decisions of the General Assembly,[17] encourages the Department to establish a closer working relationship with the Office of the President of the General Assembly, and requests the Secretary-General to report further on the progress achieved in, and the remaining challenges to, the implementation of his recommendations to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session,

15. *Emphasizes* the central role of the Committee on Information in making recommendations to the General Assembly on the mandate of the Department of Public Information, takes note of the reorientation exercise in enhancing the performance and effectiveness of the Department of Public Information, which should be in accordance with the mandates established by the Assembly, and requests the Secretary-General to report on progress achieved in this regard to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session;

16. *Requests* the Secretary-General, in the context of the reorientation process, to continue to exert all efforts to ensure that publications and other information services of the Secretariat, including the United Nations web site and the United Nations News Service, contain comprehensive, objective and equitable information about the issues before the Organization and that they maintain editorial independence, impartiality, accuracy and full consistency with resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly;

17. *Reiterates* that all printed materials of the Department of Public Information, in accordance with existing mandates, should not duplicate other publications of the United Nations system and should be produced in a cost-effective manner;

18. *Welcomes* the reconstitution of the Publications Board, in accordance with existing legislative mandates, by the Department of Public Information;

19. *Urges* the Department of Public Information to continue to exhibit transparency to the greatest extent possible, so as to increase awareness of the impact of its programmes and activities;

20. *Emphasizes* that, through its reorientation, the Department of Public Information should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and, where appropriate, other countries with special needs, including countries in transition, and that such reorientation contributes to bridging

the existing gap between the developing and the developed countries in the crucial field of public information and communications;

21. *Encourages* the Secretary-General to strengthen the coordination between the Department of Public Information and other departments of the Secretariat, including the designation of focal points to work with substantive departments, in the context of its client-oriented approach, to identify target audiences and develop information programmes and media strategies for priority issues, and emphasizes that public information capacities and activities in other departments should function under the guidance of the Department;

22. *Welcomes* the initiatives that have been taken by the Department of Public Information to strengthen the public information system of the United Nations, and, in this regard, stresses the importance of a coherent and results-oriented approach being taken by the United Nations, the specialized agencies and the programmes and funds of the United Nations system involved in public information activities, as well as the provision of resources for their implementation, and that feedback from Member States on the relevance and effectiveness of its programme delivery should be taken into account;

23. *Appreciates* the continued efforts of the Department of Public Information in issuing daily press releases, and requests the Department to continue providing this invaluable service to both Member States and representatives of the media, while considering possible means of improving their production process and streamlining their format, structure and length, keeping in mind the views of Member States;

24. *Requests* that during the deliberations on the item entitled "Questions relating to information" in the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) during the successive regular sessions of the General Assembly, an informal interaction between the Secretariat and members of the Committee should take place after the presentation by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information on the substance of that oral briefing, within existing resources;

Multilingualism and public information

25. *Welcomes* the ongoing efforts of the Department of Public Information to enhance multilingualism in its activities, and encourages the Department to continue its endeavours in this regard;

26. *Emphasizes* the importance of ensuring the full, equitable treatment of all the official languages of the United Nations in all activities of the Department of Public Information, and stresses the importance of fully implementing its resolution 52/214 of 22 December 1997, in section C of which it requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the texts of all new public documents, in all six official languages, and information materials of the United Nations are made available daily through the United Nations web site and are accessible to Member States without delay;

27. *Recognizes* the fact that the integration of the Official Document System with the United Nations web site, scheduled to take place during the fourth quarter of 2004, will significantly enhance the multilingual nature of the site by providing

free, public access to all United Nations parliamentary documents in the six official languages;

28. *Reaffirms* its request to the Secretary-General to ensure that the Department of Public Information has appropriate staffing capacity in all official languages of the United Nations to undertake all its activities;

29. *Reminds* the Secretary-General of the need to include in future programme budget proposals for the Department of Public Information the importance of using all six official languages in its activities;

Bridging the digital divide

30. *Welcomes* the holding of the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, held from 10 to 12 December 2003, and looks forward to the second phase, to be held in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005;

31. *Calls upon* the Department of Public Information to contribute to raising the awareness of the international community of the importance of the World Summit on the Information Society and the need to join efforts to make it a success;

32. *Recalls* paragraph 32 of its resolution 58/101 B, welcomes the contribution of the Department of Public Information in publicizing the efforts of the Secretary-General to close the digital divide as a means of spurring economic growth and as a response to the continuing gulf between developed and developing countries, and, in this context, requests the Department to further enhance its role;

III. New programmatic priorities for the Department of Public Information

33. *Takes note* of the note by the Secretary-General on the proposed strategic framework for the period 2006-2007 on the programmatic aspects for the Department of Public Information;[18]

34. *Notes* that the proposed strategic framework does not include the first part;

35. *Notes also* that the executive direction and management elements of the programme, as well as the details of performance measures (baselines and targets), external factors and outputs, together with resource requirements, will be reflected in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007;

36. *Stresses* the need to include in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007, to the fullest extent possible, quantifiable and verifiable indicators for measuring expected accomplishments, so as to give a clear indication of the progress towards the accomplishment of objectives set;

37. *Also stresses* the importance of full compliance with all legislative mandates when preparing the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007;

38. *Recommends* that, in the last sentence of paragraph 1 in the Overall orientation section of the note by the Secretary-General on the proposed strategic framework for the period 2006-2007,[19] the words "in particular, the legislative mandates included in the present biennial programme plan, as well as those of" be inserted after the words "General Assembly" and the word "and" be deleted;

39. *Acknowledges* that the Department of Public Information, with the assistance of the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the Secretariat, has developed an annual programme impact review to systematically evaluate its products and activities and that, as an initial step in a three-year project between the Department of Public Information and the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the first annual programme impact review was completed in January 2004, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/300 of 20 December 2002, and requests the Secretary-General to report further on the progress made to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session;

40. *Reaffirms* that the Department of Public Information must prioritize its work programme while respecting existing mandates and in line with rule 5.6 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, to focus its message and concentrate its efforts better and, as a function of performance management, to match its programmes with the needs of its target audiences, on the basis of improved feedback and evaluation mechanisms;

United Nations information centres

41. *Reaffirms* paragraph 15 of its resolution 57/300, in which it took note of the proposal of the Secretary-General contained in action 8 of his report,[14] to rationalize the network of United Nations information centres around regional hubs, where appropriate, in consultation with concerned Member States, starting with the creation of a Western European hub, followed by a similar approach in other high-cost developed countries, and requests the Secretary-General to submit a progress report on the implementation of the proposal with the objective of applying this initiative in other regions, in consultation with Member States, where this initiative will strengthen the flow and exchange of information in developing countries;

42. *Welcomes* the agreement between the Department of Public Information and the Western European countries to establish a regional United Nations information centre in Brussels;

43. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres,[20] stresses that the report could not, at the time it was written, fully address all aspects of the implementation of the rationalization of United Nations information centres in Western Europe and other high-cost developed countries, and, in this regard, requests the Secretary-General to report in detail to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session;

44. *Stresses* that the United Nations information centres and services and information components or regional hubs, as applicable, should play a significant role in disseminating information about the work of the Organization to the peoples of the world, including in the areas outlined in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, and emphasizes that the information centres, or regional hubs, as applicable, as the "field voice" of the Department of Public Information, should promote public awareness of and mobilize support for the work of the United Nations at the local level, bearing in mind that information in the local languages has the strongest impact on the local populations;

45. *Also stresses* the special needs and requirements of developing countries in the field of information and communications technology, which are important factors for the effective flow of information in those countries;

46. *Affirms* that the measures highlighted and objectives expressed in paragraphs 41 to 45 above are central to future rationalization of United Nations information centres, which must be carried out in consultation, on a case-by-case basis, with all concerned Member States in which existing information centres are located, the countries served by those information centres and other interested countries in the region, taking into consideration the distinctive characteristics of each region;

47. *Requests* the Secretariat, in the framework of the rationalization process, to extend the services of the United Nations information centres and regional United Nations information centres, where applicable, to those Member States currently outside the scope of the field information capacity of the Department of Public Information;

48. *Requests* the Secretary-General, within the framework of the rationalization process, to take into account the needs of Portuguese-speaking African countries and the offer made by the Government of Angola;

49. *Recalls* paragraph 39 of its resolution 58/270 of 23 December 2003, and welcomes, in this context, the ongoing efforts of the Department of Public Information to review the allocation of both staff and financial resources to the United Nations information centres with a view to transferring resources from information centres in developed countries to United Nations information activities in developing countries, emphasizing the needs of the least developed countries, and to any other activities of high priority, such as multilingualism on the web site and evaluation of services, in consultation with concerned Member States;

50. *Encourages* United Nations information centres and regional United Nations information centres, as applicable, to develop web pages in local languages, also encourages the Department of Public Information to provide resources and technical facilities, in particular to those information centres whose web pages are not yet operational, and further encourages host countries to respond to the needs of the information centres;

51. *Recalls* the appeal made by the Secretary-General to host countries of United Nations information centres to facilitate the work of the centres in their countries by providing rent-free or rent-subsidized premises, while taking into account the economic condition of the host countries and bearing in mind that such support should not be a substitute for the full allocation of financial resources for the information centres in the context of the programme budget of the United Nations;

52. *Notes* the continuing support of the Department of Public Information in the consolidation of the United Nations field presence in a single United Nations house, and requests the Secretary-General to report in detail on the progress made to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session;

53. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to submit progress reports on the implementation of the rationalization process to the Committee on Information at its successive sessions and to include in these reports information on the

functioning of the Department's field capacity, including newly established regional United Nations information centres, where applicable, and United Nations information centres that have undergone the rationalization process;

IV. Strategic communications services

54. *Notes* paragraph 6 of the report of the Secretary-General on the continuing reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications,[21] and, in this context, reaffirms that the Department of Public Information is the principal department responsible for the implementation of information strategies, as mandated;

55. *Affirms* the role of the strategic communications services in devising and disseminating United Nations messages by developing communications strategies, in close collaboration with the substantive departments, United Nations funds and programmes and the specialized agencies of the United Nations, in full compliance with the legislative mandates;

Promotional campaigns

56. *Recognizes* that promotional campaigns aimed at supporting special sessions and international conferences of the United Nations are part of the core responsibility of the Department of Public Information, and welcomes the efforts of the Department to examine creative ways in which it can organize and implement these campaigns in partnership with the substantive departments concerned, using the United Nations Millennium Declaration as its guide;

57. *Supports* the efforts of the Department of Public Information, while ensuring respect for the priorities established by the General Assembly, to also focus its promotional campaigns on the major issues identified by the Secretary-General;

58. *Appreciates* the work of the Department of Public Information in promoting, through its campaigns, issues of importance to the international community, such as sustainable development, children, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases and decolonization, as well as the dialogue among civilizations, culture of peace and tolerance and the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, and encourages the Department, in cooperation with the countries concerned and with the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to continue to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of these and other important global issues;

59. *Encourages* the Department of Public Information to continue to work within the United Nations Communications Group to coordinate the implementation of communication strategies with the heads of information of the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at successive sessions on the activities of the Group;

60. *Stresses* the need for the renewed emphasis in support of Africa's development, in particular by the Department of Public Information, in order to promote awareness in the international community of the nature of the critical economic and social situation in Africa and of the priorities of the New Partnership for Africa's Development;[22]

Role of the Department of Public Information in United Nations peacekeeping

61. *Commends* the efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information for the establishment and functioning of the information components of peacekeeping operations and of political and peace-building missions of the United Nations, including its promotional efforts and other information support activities, and requests the Secretariat to continue to ensure the involvement of the Department from the planning stage of future operations through interdepartmental consultations and coordination with other departments of the Secretariat, in particular with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations;

62. *Stresses* the importance of enhancing the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information in the field of peacekeeping operations and its role in the selection process of spokespersons for United Nations peacekeeping operations or missions, and, in this regard, encourages the Department to second spokespersons who have the necessary skills to fulfil the tasks of the operations or missions, taking into account the equitable geographical distribution in accordance with Chapter XV, Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations, and to consider views expressed, especially by host countries, when appropriate, in this regard;

63. *Welcomes* the actions taken by the Department of Public Information to increase its involvement in the planning stage of new or expanding peacekeeping operations, as well as the deployment of public information components in new missions, and also welcomes the improvements made to the peacekeeping portal on the United Nations web site;

64. *Encourages* the Department of Public Information to continue its efforts in supporting the peacekeeping missions to further develop their web sites;

65. *Regrets* the information gap between the new realities and successes of peacekeeping operations, especially multidimensional and complex ones, and the public perceptions, as stated by the Secretary-General in his report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations,[23] and stresses the need for a comprehensive public information strategy on peacekeeping operations, undertaken in close coordination with other relevant departments, in order to overcome this gap and ensure a positive public impact;

66. *Emphasizes* the need for interdepartmental cooperation between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Public Information in order to develop the strategy requested in paragraph 65 above;

67. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to report to the Committee on Information on the role of the Department of Public Information in United Nations peacekeeping at its successive sessions;

Role of the Department of Public Information in strengthening dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace as means of enhancing understanding among nations

68. *Recalls* its resolutions 53/22 of 4 November 1998 and 55/23 of 13 November 2000 on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, 52/15 of 20 November 1997, proclaiming 2000 as the International Year for the

Culture of Peace, 53/25 of 10 November 1998, proclaiming the period 2001-2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, and 56/6 of 9 November 2001 on the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations, encourages the Department of Public Information to provide the necessary support, within existing resources, for the dissemination of information pertaining to dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace and to take due steps in fostering the culture of dialogue among civilizations via all mass media, such as the Internet, print, radio and television, and requests the Secretary-General to submit a report in this regard at the twenty-seventh session of the Committee on Information;

V. News services

69. *Stresses* that the central objective of the news services, implemented by the News and Media Division, is the timely delivery of accurate, objective and balanced news and information emanating from the United Nations system in all four mass media — print, radio, television and Internet — to the media and other audiences worldwide with the overall emphasis on multilingualism;

Traditional means of communication

70. *Also stresses* that radio remains one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching traditional media available to the Department of Public Information and an important instrument in United Nations activities, including development and peacekeeping, with a view to achieving a broad client base around the world;

71. *Notes* that the international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations has been made an integral part of the activities of the Department of Public Information, and requests the Secretary-General to make every effort to ensure its success and report on its activities to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session;

72. *Requests* the Secretary-General to pay full attention to the parity of the six official languages in expanding the international radio broadcasting capacity;

73. *Notes* the efforts being made by the Department of Public Information to disseminate programmes directly to broadcasting stations all over the world in the six official languages, with the addition of Portuguese, as well as in other languages, where possible, and, in this regard, stresses the need for impartiality and objectivity concerning information activities of the United Nations;

74. *Encourages* the Department of Public Information to continue building partnerships with local, national and regional broadcasters to extend the United Nations message to all the corners of the world in an accurate and impartial way;

75. *Emphasizes* that United Nations Radio and Television should take full advantage of the technological infrastructure made available in recent years, including satellite platforms, information and communication technologies and the Internet, and requests the Secretary-General, as a part of the reorientation of the Department of Public Information, to consider a global strategy for broadcasting, taking into account existing technologies;

United Nations web site

76. *Reiterates its appreciation* for the efforts of the Department of Public Information in creating a high-quality, user-friendly and cost-effective web site, noting that this is especially noteworthy considering the scope of the undertaking, the budget constraints within the United Nations and the remarkably rapid expansion of the World Wide Web, and reaffirms that the web site remains a very useful tool for media, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, Member States and the general public;

77. *Stresses* the need for the Department of Public Information to take further necessary measures to ensure accessibility to the United Nations web site by persons with disabilities, including visual and hearing disabilities, calls upon the Department, as a first step, to make further efforts for all new and revised pages to adhere to the obligatory level of compliance with recognized industry standards regarding such accessibility and, within existing resources, to work towards compliance with all other levels of such standards, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session on progress made in this regard;

78. *Notes* that the multilingual development and enrichment of the United Nations web site has improved, although at a slower rate than expected owing to several constraints that need to be addressed, and, in this regard, encourages the Department of Public Information, in coordination with content-providing offices, to improve the actions undertaken to achieve parity among the six official languages on the United Nations web site;

79. *Stresses* the need to adopt a decision on the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site, considering, inter alia, the possibility of organizational restructuring towards separate language units for each of the six official languages within the Department of Public Information, in order to achieve full parity among the official languages of the United Nations;

80. *Reaffirms* its request to the Secretary-General to ensure, until such a decision has been taken and implemented, to the extent possible and while maintaining an up-to-date and accurate web site, the equitable distribution of financial and human resources within the Department of Public Information allocated to the United Nations web site among all official languages on a continuous basis, and to make every possible effort to ensure also that all materials contained on the web site that do not change and do not need regular maintenance are made available in all six official languages;

81. *Also reaffirms* the need to achieve full parity among the six official languages on the United Nations web sites, and, in this regard, takes note of the proposal of the Secretary-General[24] to translate all English materials and databases posted on the United Nations web sites by the respective content-providing offices of the Secretariat into all official languages, and reiterates its request to the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session on the most practical, efficient and cost-effective means of implementing this proposal;

82. *Requests* the Secretary-General to include in his report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session proposals relating to the designation of a date by which all supporting arrangements would be in place for the

implementation of this concept, after which date parity would continue, as well as proposals relating to the exemption from translation of specific items on the United Nations web site;

83. *Stresses* the importance of access for the public to the United Nations Treaty Collection and United Nations parliamentary documentation;

84. *Encourages* the Department of Public Information to implement an e-mail service to inform subscribers of recent additions to the United Nations web site;

85. *Encourages* the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to continue to take full advantage of recent developments in information technology in order to improve, in a cost-effective manner, the expeditious dissemination of information on the United Nations, in accordance with the priorities established by the General Assembly and taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization;

86. *Notes* the gap among different official languages on United Nations web sites, and recognizes that some official languages use non-Latin and bidirectional scripts;

87. *Recognizes* that technological infrastructures and supportive applications in the United Nations are based on Latin script, which leads to difficulties in processing non-Latin and bidirectional scripts, and encourages the Department of Public Information to continue its efforts, to the extent possible, to ensure that technological infrastructures and supportive applications in the United Nations fully support Latin, non-Latin and bidirectional scripts so as to enhance the equality of all official languages on the United Nations web site;

88. *Notes with satisfaction* that access to the Official Document System will be provided free to the public by the end of 2004, and requests the Secretary-General to report on progress to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session;

89. *Commends* the Information Technology Services Division of the Office of Central Support Services of the Secretariat on its efforts to ensure that the required technological infrastructure is in place to accommodate the linkage of the Official Document System to the United Nations web site, and also commends the Department of Public Information for addressing issues of content management relating to that System;

90. *Takes note* of paragraph 56 of its resolution 58/270, in which it reaffirmed that the Official Document System, as an archival and retrieval system of official documents, should cover the entire Organization, and requests the Secretary-General to transmit the report requested in this regard to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session;

91. *Welcomes* the electronic mail-based United Nations News Service, distributed worldwide through e-mail by the Department of Public Information, and requests the Department to provide this service in all official languages, ensuring that news-breaking stories and news alerts are accurate, impartial and free of bias;

92. *Also welcomes* the inclusion of news e-mail services in the English and French languages and the Secretary-General's intention to include the other official languages in these services by 2004;

93. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General to continue to work within the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and other appropriate inter-agency bodies to establish a United Nations portal, an inter-agency search facility encompassing the public web sites of all United Nations system organizations, and requests the Secretary-General to report on this matter to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session;

94. *Reiterates* its request to the Department of Public Information to encourage all United Nations system entities to participate in the United Nations system search pilot project, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session on the activities of the High-Level Committee on Management in this regard;

95. *Reaffirms* paragraph 42 of its resolution 58/270, in which it requested the Secretary-General to strengthen the web site through further redeployment to the required language posts;

VI. Library services

96. *Welcomes* the progress reported by the Secretary-General in his report on the modernization and integrated management of United Nations libraries and in-depth review of library activities,[25] in particular the efforts to fill gaps in the Official Document System, establish common standards for indexing, cataloguing and collection development, produce a common list of serials, eliminate duplication in the acquisition of electronic information, create joint web pages and assess the needs of the smaller libraries of the Organization;

97. *Also welcomes* the creation of the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries, and commends the Steering Committee for its coordinating role and initial organizational efforts and for reaching agreement on an impressive programme of work;

98. *Acknowledges* that the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, as part of the Outreach Division of the Department of Public Information, endeavours to facilitate access to timely and up-to-date library products and services for use by delegates, permanent missions of Member States, the Secretariat, researchers and depository libraries worldwide, notes the continuing efforts of the Secretary-General to make the Library a virtual library with world outreach, reiterates the need to enable the provision of hard copies to Member States, subject to the relevant provisions of its resolution 57/283 B of 15 April 2003, and also notes the efforts of the Secretary-General to enrich, on a multilingual basis, the stock of books and journals in the Library, including publications on peace and security and development-related issues, in order to ensure that the Library continues to be a broadly accessible resource for information about the United Nations and its activities;

99. *Calls upon* the Department of Public Information to continue to lead the Steering Committee, encourages the member libraries of the Steering Committee to coordinate closely and to establish time frames for fulfilment of its programme of work, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information

at its successive sessions on the activities of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the work of the Steering Committee;

100. *Takes note* of paragraph 50 of its resolution 58/270, in which it requested the Secretary-General to conduct, through the Office of Internal Oversight Services, a review of the operation and management of United Nations libraries, with a view to assessing staffing requirements for those libraries in the light of technological advances in the delivery of information services, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, and requests the Secretary-General to transmit that report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session;

101. *Recognizes* the importance of the depository libraries in disseminating information and knowledge about United Nations activities, and, in this connection, urges the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, in its capacity as the focal point, to take the initiatives necessary to strengthen such libraries by providing regional training and other assistance;

102. *Notes* the holding of training courses conducted by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library for the representatives of Member States and Secretariat staff on the use of Cyberseek, web search, the Intranet, United Nations documentation, United Nations Info Quest and the Official Document System of the United Nations;

103. *Recalls* paragraph 44 of its resolution 56/64 B of 24 December 2001, in which it welcomed the role of the Department of Public Information in fostering increased collaboration among libraries of the United Nations system, particularly in establishing one central system-wide online catalogue that would allow for the searching of the bibliographic records of all print holdings of all United Nations system libraries, commends the International Computing Centre for developing the United Nations System Shared Cataloguing and Public Access System, which provides a single point of access to library catalogues, indexes and abstract databases, library holdings, links to full-text resources and archives, also commends the Department for its role in the development of the United Nations System Shared Cataloguing and Public Access System, requests the Department to encourage all United Nations system organizations to participate in the System, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session in this regard;

104. *Notes with appreciation* the operation of a common library in Nairobi within existing resources, in line with the approach set out in paragraph 37 of the Secretary-General's report on the modernization and integrated management of United Nations Libraries and in-depth review of library activities,[25] and urges all United Nations offices in Nairobi to participate in and support this venture;

VII. Outreach services

105. *Acknowledges* that the outreach services, implemented by the Outreach Division of the Department of Public Information, continue to work towards promoting awareness of the role and work of the United Nations on priority issues;

106. *Notes* the importance of the continued implementation by the Department of Public Information of the ongoing programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and countries in transition, as mandated by the General Assembly, and encourages the Department to consider how best to maximize the

benefits derived from the programme by reviewing, inter alia, its duration and the number of its participants;

107. *Recognizes* the need for the Department of Public Information to increase its outreach services in all regions, and reiterates the need to include, in the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications, an analysis of the present reach and scope of the activities of the Department, identifying the widest possible spectrum of audiences and geographical areas that are not covered adequately and that may require special attention, including the appropriate means of communication and bearing in mind local language requirements;

108. *Welcomes* the movement towards educational outreach and the orientation of the *UN Chronicle*, both print and online editions, to this end;

109. *Calls upon* the Department of Public Information to strengthen its role as a focal point for two-way interaction with civil society relating to the priorities and concerns of the Organization;

110. *Congratulates* the United Nations Correspondents Association for its Dag Hammarskjöld Memorial Scholarship Fund, which sponsors journalists from developing countries to come to the United Nations Headquarters and report on the activities during the General Assembly, and urges donors to extend financial support to the Fund so that it may increase the number of such scholarships to journalists in this context;

111. *Notes* that the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations will be observed in 2005, and requests the Department of Public Information to take necessary measures to publicize the occasion in every way possible, stressing the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter and highlighting its accomplishments in the past six decades;

VIII. Final remarks

112. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-seventh session and to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the present resolution;

113. *Requests* the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session;

114. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its sixtieth session the item entitled "Questions relating to information".

Draft decision
Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information

The General Assembly decides to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 102 to 107 and to appoint Cape Verde, Iceland, Luxembourg, Madagascar and Qatar as members of the Committee on Information.

54. Following the adoption of the draft resolutions and the draft decision, statements were made by several delegations. The representative of Qatar, speaking

on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, noted that the network of United Nations information centres continued to play a vital role in promoting the work of the United Nations in developing countries. In implementing the Secretary-General's proposals for rationalization of the centres, the Department must take into account the differences between Western Europe and the developing countries, he said, and underlined that any future decision should be based on consultations with the host countries and only on a case-by-case basis. In expressing similar views, the representative of Bangladesh, Morocco, Nepal and Pakistan reiterated the importance of United Nations information centres in developing countries and asked that the needs of the developing countries be taken into account prior to any further rationalization. In noting that his delegation had joined in the consensus on the draft resolution, the representative of Bangladesh stressed that the rationalization process should, in the case of developing countries, particularly the least developing countries, take into account the linguistic, social and cultural differences which existed, as well as the disparities in information and communication technologies. The representative of Morocco underlined that the Secretary-General's proposal for rationalization of the centres remained subject to a number of conditions, as enumerated in paragraph 15 of resolution 57/300. She also underlined the need for a progress report to be submitted on rationalization in Western Europe as well as in high-cost developed countries. She urged that rationalization should take into account the importance of existing centres and the specific characteristics of each region, called for the transfer of released resources to existing centres in developing countries as well as to areas of high priority, and, in that regard, recalled paragraph 20 of the Secretary-General's report (A/58/351). The representative of Nepal indicated that his delegation had joined the consensus on the draft resolution on the understanding that the Department of Public Information would review the proposal on rationalization of the United Nations information centres, consult on a case-by-case basis with the concerned Member States in which the existing information centres were located and take into account their views for any further action in that regard. The views of the aforementioned speakers were also supported by the delegations of Burkina Faso, Togo and Madagascar.

55. The representative of Morocco, referring to draft resolution B contained in document A/AC.198/2004/L.3, noted her delegation's preference for placing paragraph 49 after paragraph 45. However, in the spirit of consensus, she was willing to accept the present sequencing, but asked that that view be reflected in the record. The same view was also expressed by the representative of Bangladesh.

56. The representative of Ecuador, referring to the accessibility of the United Nations web site by people with disabilities, emphasized that every effort must be made to make the United Nations as a whole more accessible to those persons. The representative of Costa Rica reiterated the importance that his country attached to protecting the interest of persons with disabilities and, in that regard, stressed that his delegation had joined the consensus on the understanding that, as stated in paragraph 77 of the draft resolution, the further efforts to be made by the Department of Public Information in order to comply with the obligatory level of accessibility for all new and revised web pages were only a first step. He expressed the hope that the Department of Public Information, as well as all the other departments of the Secretariat, would ensure the required access for persons with disabilities to all sites, both physical and virtual.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/36/21); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* and corrigendum (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* and corrigenda (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/39/21); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/40/21); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/41/21); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/42/21); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/43/21); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/44/21); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/45/21); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/46/21); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/47/21); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/48/21); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/49/21); ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/50/21); and ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/51/21).

[3] Ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/52/21/Rev.1).

[4] Ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/53/21/Rev.1).

[5] Ibid., *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* and addendum (A/54/21 and Add.1).

[6] Ibid., *Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/55/21).

[7] Ibid., *Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/56/21).

[8] Ibid., *Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/57/21).

[9] Ibid., *Fifty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/58/21).

[10] To be issued as *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/59/21).

[11] A/59/__.

[12] See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Records of the General Conference, Twenty-first Session, Belgrade, 23 September-28 October 1980*, vol. 1, *Resolutions*, sect. III.4, resolution 4/21.

[13] A/AC.198/2003/2.

[14] A/57/387 and Corr.1.

[15] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 6* and corrigendum (A/57/6/Rev.1 and Corr.1).

[16] See resolution 55/2.

[17] See A/AC.198/2004/6.

[18] A/AC.198/2004/7.

[19] Ibid., annex.

[20] A/AC.198/2004/3.

[21] A/AC.198/2004/2.

[22] A/57/304, annex.

[23] A/58/694, para. 56.

[24] A/AC.198/2002/6, para. 33.

[25] A/AC.198/2004/4.

Annex I

Statement by the Chairman of the Committee on Information at the opening of the twenty-sixth session of the Committee, held on 26 April 2004

1. First of all, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Shashi Tharoor and, through him, to the Department of Public Information for the excellent cooperation extended to me and to the members of the Bureau of the Committee on Information during the past year.

2. Presiding over this Committee for the second year, I am comforted by the knowledge that the Department is led by someone who is known not only for his prodigious qualities but also for his unwavering commitment to the ideals of the United Nations as the embodiment of our common hope and collective goodwill. This Committee looks forward to working with you, Mr. Tharoor, and with your Department, to further effect the transformation that has already brought about its renewal.

3. The close working relationship between the Department of Public Information and the Committee, forged at the time of the twenty-fifth session, has continued throughout the year. A good example of this rapport was my participation, at the Department's invitation, in the World Electronic Media Forum, held in Geneva in December 2003. The overall objective of this parallel event organized by the Department at the time of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society was to engage the media as stakeholders in the information society and to emphasize the principle of freedom of opinion and expression, and their corollary, press freedom. I was also deeply gratified to be able to represent the Committee at the first phase of this important meeting on the information society.

4. As you know, as Chairman of the Second Committee, I wear a second hat. I do see a lot of complementarities between the two Committees, especially in terms of prioritization and focus. At the last session of the Committee, as well as in the Second Committee, we devoted a lot of time to discussing the crisis in Iraq and its implications. While the situation today is not radically different from that of last year, we definitely need to look beyond Iraq. Indeed, Iraq continues to remain on top of the global agenda, but there are other issues that also need to be addressed. The Secretary-General has often drawn our attention to some of the more pressing and more immediate threats facing the vast majority of the world's population: threats of extreme poverty and hunger, unsafe drinking water, environmental degradation and endemic or infectious diseases. These challenges are collectively addressed in the 2000 Millennium Declaration. I hope that at this session of the Committee on Information, we will have more time to focus on the Millennium Development Goals, which provide us with precise and time-bound targets to address those challenges.

5. The observance next year of the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations will provide us with an opportunity to take stock of what the Organization has done and how the Member States have helped to accomplish its goals. If you ask me, no matter which yardstick one applies, the achievements of the Organization during these past six decades have been monumental.

6. Ask the people in Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala or Mozambique about the United Nations and I am sure they would say, "Thank you, United Nations," for bringing peace to their lands. Ask the people of South Africa and they would say, "Thank you, United Nations," for helping to end apartheid; ask millions of refugees and internally displaced persons around the world and they would say, "Thank you, United Nations," for giving them shelter. To millions of people affected by poverty, environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS and communicable diseases, the United Nations remains the best hope — often the only hope — for survival and for a better future.

7. Of course, the United Nations has not solved all problems the world faces. But if we want to see them solved — including such problems as the turmoil in the Middle East, the question of Palestine, the problems concerning Cyprus and in West Africa, to name a few — we need the United Nations more than ever before.

8. The observance of the sixtieth anniversary will be an occasion to reaffirm our commitment to the ideals of the United Nations. It must also be an occasion for energizing global public opinion about the evolving role of the world body. The anniversary will not be truly meaningful unless the people of the world come to know about it and become part of this observance. Our Committee should reflect on this and provide policy guidelines to the Department of Public Information so that it takes the lead in promoting this observance in every way possible.

9. Now a few more words about this year's session, which, I believe, will be important for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it will provide us with an opportunity to review the state of United Nations reform as it affects the Department of Public Information. In the past two years, major changes have taken place in the Department. There have been both structural and operational overhauls. The report on the continuing reorientation of the Department gives us some clear yardsticks to measure the success of these changes and I look forward to the statement of the Under-Secretary-General on the latest status of the reform measures put in place, including regionalization of the network of United Nations information centres. This and five other reports, which were circulated well in advance, provide a good and clear picture of the changes brought about under the Secretary-General's reform process. I am glad to note that in preparing the reports, the Department of Public Information has taken advantage of the guidelines it was given by our Committee in the area of public information. I know that you have carefully examined these reports, submitted to us for our consideration, and that they will shape the general debate.

10. I would also like to draw your attention to the note by the Secretary-General on the proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2006-2007. This strategic framework will replace the current four-year medium-term plan. This important document, prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 58/269, provides an overall orientation for the Department of Public Information and includes the proposed biennial programme plan for the biennium 2006-2007. This is key in our understanding of what the four subprogrammes of the Department expect to accomplish and what indicators of achievement they will use during this period. As you will recall, General Assembly resolution 52/220 stressed the role of the relevant intergovernmental bodies, such as our Committee, in the consideration of the narrative of the proposed programme budget. It is therefore important that we carefully consider the note and convey our views to the General Assembly.

11. Needless to say that our objective at this year's session, as usual, will be to adopt a consensus document at the end of our two-week deliberations. With the changed format, we now have more time for negotiations over the draft resolution. We should take advantage of this arrangement and focus on our overarching objective: to collectively provide the best possible policy guidance to the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Tharoor, so that our Organization continues to benefit from the strong voice given to it by the Department of Public Information.

12. As your Chairman, I promise to do my part. I am sure you will do yours.

Annex II

Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information at the opening of the twenty-sixth session of the Committee on Information, held on 26 April 2003

1. It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to address the Committee on Information as it begins its twenty-sixth session. The honour, of course, is customary, but the pleasure is not routine. The past year has been marked by very positive cooperation between the Committee and the Department of Public Information. If the warm and kind words addressed to the Department, in general, and to me, in particular, by the Chairman, Ambassador Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, are any indication, I am convinced that this tradition will not only continue but will also be further strengthened. During the current phase of its renewal, the Department has greatly benefited from your guidance, Mr. Chairman, and from the collective wisdom of the Bureau, helping to steer it in the right direction. Your cogent and instructive statement today is one more example of this. You said you will do your part. You have done more than your part, Mr. Chairman, and I do thank you very much on behalf of my Department and my colleagues, and I wish to express through you our deepest gratitude and indebtedness to your team, to your Bureau and your staff for your continued support and cooperation.

2. The membership of the Committee has steadily grown over the years. With the admission of three new Member States — St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Switzerland — it is now 102 members strong and we hear of further interest from other Member States. The Department of Public Information has always welcomed constructive interaction between itself and the members of the Committee. Your active participation in the general debate and year-round contacts with my staff in the Department bear clear witness not only to your interest in the work of the United Nations on questions relating to information, but also to your abiding commitment to making the Department of Public Information the effective public voice of the Organization.

3. Last year, when I addressed the Committee, the United Nations was already faced with the serious challenges posed by the events relating to Iraq. It was a difficult year for the Organization, indeed a tragic one, in which many greatly valued colleagues lost their lives in Baghdad. The institution itself suffered collateral damage, with some openly talking about the United Nations becoming irrelevant.

4. Today, one year later, there are growing signs that the standing of the Organization — to use a word from a *New York Times* headline — is "rebounding". Slowly, but surely, the United Nations is being perceived as regaining its indispensable role in global affairs.

5. Admittedly, spirits at the United Nations have at times been low, yet its vital work continued around the world. This Committee understands that any attempt to reduce the relevance of the United Nations to its conduct on any one issue is completely misconceived. We know the media prefers to focus on "hard threats" — such as acts of terrorism or dangers posed by weapons of mass destruction. The "soft threats", so called, such as extreme poverty and hunger, endemic or infectious

disease, or environmental degradation that afflict millions of people, rarely make the headlines. Though the risk of being attacked by terrorists or with weapons of mass destruction, or even of falling prey to genocide, are real enough for all, the dangers of extreme poverty, hunger and disease are ever-present in the lives of millions of people in poor countries. These "problems without passports" — both "hard" and "soft" threats — are challenges that no one country, however powerful, can confront and overcome all alone. The only way to tackle them is together, through common endeavours in pursuit of common goals, ideally using the mechanisms of the United Nations.

6. For us at the Department of Public Information, the options are never simply "either/or". We have to address all issues, hard and soft, critical and controversial, today and every day. We have no choice but to respond to the insistent demands of the news stories of the day — normally in the world's "hot spots", which today means focusing on Iraq and its future and the allegations of wrongdoing in the management of the oil-for-food programme in that country. But we cannot afford merely to echo the media's priorities. We have to constantly strive to keep the "big picture" on the media's agenda, reminding the world that there are other critical areas that need equal, if not more, attention. How this is done and what has been accomplished is recounted in the Secretary-General's report on the continuing reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/2004/2). But more on that later.

7. As part of our continuing efforts to highlight the priorities of the United Nations — *your* priorities — the Department plans to focus at this year's observance of World Press Freedom Day on what is missing from the world's media headlines. As agreed with the Bureau, this year's observance of World Press Freedom Day will take place on the morning of 3 May, the actual day, and include the usual two parts: a formal institutional session and an informal panel discussion. The theme for the panel discussion, "Reporting and under-reporting: who decides?", is related to the list of 10 stories of global importance the world should hear more about, which the Department will announce in connection with World Press Freedom Day. We have deliberately chosen this timing in order to highlight the importance of the work and responsibilities of your Committee.

8. As requested in paragraphs 12 and 88 of resolution 58/101 B, I would now like to report to you on the activities of the Department and on the implementation of your recommendations. Through consultations with the Bureau of the Committee, it was decided that the information requested in resolution 58/101 B, as well as in resolutions 58/126 of 19 December 2003 and 58/270 of 23 December 2003, would be grouped into six reports, the most comprehensive of which would be the one dealing with the continuing reorientation of the Department of Public Information. The remaining reports would address requests for information on more specific areas, including an in-depth review of library activities, the rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres, the activities of the United Nations Communications Group in 2003 and, for the first time, a report on better publicizing the work and decisions of the General Assembly.

9. As a result of my obligation to touch on all of these, however briefly, I regret that my statement this morning will do little to enhance my reputation for brevity. But I hope, Mr. Chairman, that it would not dilute my claim to relevance. Even then I cannot cover everything. Let me remind you that the Department, as agreed with

the Bureau, will host an informal interactive dialogue with the members of the Committee on what the Department does and how it does it. This dialogue, which replaces the traditional informal briefing by the Department to the Committee members, will take place today in this room, Conference Room 2, from 3 to 6 p.m. and will provide you with an informal setting in which to interact with Department staff and management on the entire gamut of the Department's activities. This dialogue should be particularly useful to those delegates who are taking part in the work of the Committee for the first time and are not fully familiar with the Department's activities. So, please join us later in the afternoon. And please make an effort to be on time because we intend to begin with a seven-minute audio-visual presentation on the work of the Department of Public Information to set the tone for the discussion, with all the bells and whistles, which you will miss if you arrive after 3.07 p.m.!

10. With the implementation of the September 2002 reform proposals of the Secretary-General, a comprehensive and broad-based restructuring of the Department of Public Information has now been implemented. This process, initiated by the General Assembly through its resolution 56/253, calling for a comprehensive review of the Department's management and operations, was essentially steered by this Committee. The General Assembly, agreeing with your recommendations made at the twenty-fourth as well as the twenty-fifth sessions, in its resolutions 57/130 B and 58/101 B, welcomed the Secretary-General's proposals and the Department's efforts to improve its public information activities. Today, as a result of this reform process, the Department has undergone a transformation, complete with a new mission statement, a new operating model and a new organizational structure. It has developed a new strategic approach at the core of which lie a new client-oriented service, greater system-wide coordination and a new culture of evaluation embedded into the work of the Department.

11. I do not intend to review each of these elements at length, as we have already done so in detail in the Secretary-General's reports submitted for your consideration. Instead, with your permission, I will concentrate on a few highlights and examine together with you what has so far worked and what has not.

12. In its ongoing process of reform and reorientation, the Department of Public Information has acquired the tools needed to deliver on the challenges set by the Secretary-General in his report, "Strengthening the United Nations: an agenda for change". Initially we faced a few teething problems, a few hiccups, but after 12 months of client meetings, communications strategies and system-wide coordination in planning and implementation, we can say with confidence that the measures taken were right and necessary.

13. A new element in our work is the systematic evaluation of our products and activities based on well-defined and measurable indicators of achievement.

14. As we informed the Committee members last year, the Department of Public Information has begun to work with the Office of Internal Oversight Services on a three-year project to institute an internal mechanism for performance management, which of course is in line with the Secretary-General's reform programme. For the Department, this first year has witnessed the introduction of an annual programme impact review, which, with the United Nations taste for acronyms, has now been reduced to APIR. For the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Department of Public Information serves as a pilot project on institutionalizing self-evaluation with

a view to offering it to other Secretariat departments for possible replication. What this has entailed for the Department is that, on the basis of our new mission statement and the setting of departmental and divisional goals, the annual programme impact review has allowed programme managers to identify performance indicators and collect baseline data to evaluate the effectiveness of Department products and activities over time. As distinguished delegates may have had the opportunity to observe, incorporated throughout the reorientation report is the initial set of data collected as the empirical foundation of this new mindset of strategic planning and the creation of a culture of evaluation.

15. We know we have a long road ahead before we can claim that we are able to appraise the effect and impact of all our products and activities systematically. However, the annual programme impact review has already encouraged programme managers to focus on results and on the evaluation of programme effectiveness in selected areas. In order to illustrate what I mean, allow me to share with you some concrete examples of the outcome of these efforts so far.

- Systematic feedback solicited from visitors who take our guided tours indicates that, in 9 of 10 cases, visitors leave the tour with a better understanding of the work of the Organization and more support for it than when they started

- Ninety-nine per cent of respondents in a survey among the non-governmental organizations participating in the annual Department conference indicate that they are committed to promoting the United Nations in their own public information activities

- For nearly 90 per cent of readers of the *Africa Recovery* magazine, the information published there is not readily available elsewhere

- Having set a target that at least 65 per cent of all press releases — which, as you know, are more often used by delegations than by the press — would be issued within two hours of the end of a meeting covered, the Department's press service was able to achieve a higher success rate, between 68 and 70 per cent.

16. By identifying expected accomplishments and defining measurable indicators, such as user satisfaction, we were able to find out what worked and what did not. For example, a Dag Hammarskjöld Library user survey, in which I hope some of you participated, found that users want improved or enhanced services in a number of areas. It revealed that users were mostly satisfied with the Library, but were not aware of specific Library services that we offer. Managers immediately reacted by expanding their efforts to raise awareness about the Library's programmes.

17. The Department, in its efforts to redefine its focus and sharpen its operational tools, has also been greatly helped by the establishment of formal client relationships with Secretariat departments and the strengthened efforts to bring the members of the United Nations system within a common communications framework. It now works with 24 client departments and is developing a communications strategy for each priority established in cooperation with them. The entire United Nations system has now been integrated within the United Nations Communications Group, which, through its weekly meetings and working groups, is able to speak with one voice on United Nations priority issues. Let me give you some recent examples.

18. The World Summit on the Information Society, the first phase of which took place in Geneva in December 2003, posed special challenges for public information staffers. The Department worked closely with the International Telecommunication Union and played a vital strategic role in shaping the communications agenda and, with it, the political agenda of the Summit. In our messages, we stressed the principle of press freedom, and in our outreach, aimed to generate coverage by more mainstream media rather than just technology publications and outlets. We drew on long-standing political and media contacts to broaden the outreach of our partner agencies and, by setting up high-impact interviews and placing op-eds by senior officials in the lead-up to the Summit, helped to raise its profile. As a result, media coverage was extensive and, considering some of the problems faced by the first phase of the Summit, largely positive. We now look forward to contributing to the second phase, to be held in Tunis next year.

19. For the 2003 World AIDS Day, the Department of Public Information coordinated a system-wide two-week "media blitz" — a new model for short-term, concentrated campaigns by which staff placed op-eds and organized interviews for a number of senior United Nations officials, using them as spokespersons to expand outreach in target regions. The "blitz" made use of the United Nations information centres' capacity for local outreach and managed to generate more and better-targeted media coverage than previously garnered for any World AIDS Day.

20. Another good example of collaboration with a client department is our work with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. The Department of Public Information has been discussing with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations ways in which public attention can be drawn to the dramatic new surge in peacekeeping demands. Generating support among Member States for these new and expanding operations, particularly in finding sufficient and skilled military and civilian police personnel, is a major challenge. The two Departments have collaborated on the production of an up-to-date brochure on multidimensional complex peacekeeping operations, which has been cast to highlight and explain the issue. This has been posted on the Department of Peacekeeping Operations web site. In addition, the Department of Public Information has helped place op-eds prepared by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations that highlight this challenge. Both Departments will continue to seek further methods of achieving this goal, including through the outreach capacities of United Nations information centres and services.

21. Planning for the rapid and effective deployment of new missions is another key area of cooperation. During the past year, the Department of Public Information participated in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations-led assessment missions to Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Haiti. It conducted a media needs assessment mission to Iraq. And in Liberia, the Department of Public Information seconded staff to help with mission start-up. The Department has also contributed to planning for expected missions in Burundi and the Sudan and has worked with senior officials in the Secretariat and United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq to develop an information component for that mission in anticipation of the Organization's return to Iraq.

22. The Department of Public Information remains in close contact with information components of ongoing missions, supporting them as they face evolving challenges. In December 2003, the Department organized and funded a two-day workshop in Dakar on public information for disarmament, demobilization and

reintegration programmes. Senior public information officers from United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa, as well as other experts, participated in the seminar, which produced a template strategy for use in future missions. Currently, the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, is preparing a week-long training course scheduled to be held at the United Nations logistics base in Brindisi, Italy, in June 2004. The course, which is jointly funded by the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Public Information, will train teams of public information officers to ensure that they achieve peak readiness for rapid deployment. They will emerge thoroughly familiar with strategic communications procedures, standard operating procedures and best practices, and will be prepared to hit the ground able to start up crucial information work as soon as or even before the mission is deployed.

23. The Department of Public Information has also expanded the scope and quality of information on peacekeeping available on the United Nations web site and maintains a range of pages for all 57 current and past peacekeeping operations. To improve the timeliness of this information, many of these pages are dynamically updated with the latest headlines from the UN News Centre web site. It has cooperated with peacekeeping missions to help them develop their own web pages.

24. Another Department of Public Information priority is its work in support of the Organization's counter-terrorism activities, including efforts to raise awareness among Member States of the importance of ratifying and implementing existing counter-terrorism conventions. United Nations information centres around the world have reached out to various communities and constituencies to promote the 12 United Nations counter-terrorism instruments. In addition, the Department will continue to promote the crucial work of the Organization to reverse poverty and intolerance and other conditions that may facilitate the spread of terrorism.

25. One of the greatest challenges facing the Department over the past year has been to improve the Organization's ability to communicate effectively with people in the Middle East, where its standing has in recent years fallen lower than ever before. Over the past year, the Department has taken a series of steps that, we hope, will improve the Organization's image in the region. Beginning in June 2003, we have worked with colleagues in other departments and United Nations agencies to develop a strategic communications framework for the Middle East and Arab region. The strategy was adopted in September 2003. We believe it will provide the basis for sustained efforts to improve the image and understanding of the Organization in the Arab region. In May, we will meet with our United Nations system colleagues, this time in Beirut, to review what has been done over the past few months and to devise an operational programme of activities that we will all implement.

26. A particular focus of the Department's work has been its contribution to ongoing discussions with the Office of the Special Adviser for Africa on a "global communications and advocacy strategy for NEPAD", or the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The Special Adviser has been invited to present a draft of the plan to the United Nations Communications Group, in Nairobi in June. This is not the first time he will address the Group. Meanwhile, the Africa Section is working on two projects that are basic to any strategy. One will make available a highly readable print version of the actual NEPAD programme in languages used by large numbers of Africans so that people who need to be involved can learn of the

programme first hand. The second is a short publication which will explain the details of the programme in lay person's terms, giving examples of projects under way to bring NEPAD to fruition.

27. Eight years and 10 months ago, the United Nations stepped into the Internet age with the launch of the United Nations web site. It was uncharted territory; the Organization had very little expertise, no resources, no dedicated staff and no precedent to follow. Yet, in this short period of time, our presence on the Web has grown to the point where the United Nations web site is one of the world's premier information sites. Visitors to www.un.org are now viewing more than 1 million pages every day. You may recall that I had told you that we had two billion hits last year. This year, we expect to reach three billion, not only in the six official languages of the Organization, but also, thanks in large part to our offices in the field, in 27 other languages.

28. Our venture into the world of the Web has opened new vistas of integration within the Department, as well as between the Department and other departments. Here are a few examples of how we have integrated the Internet in the way we work:

- Most of our printed outputs, like the *UN Chronicle* and *Africa Recovery*, all UN Radio programmes and most United Nations photographs taken by our photographers are now available through the United Nations web site within minutes of production
- Two regular UN Television outputs — UN in Action and the World Chronicle — can be viewed at any time of your choice
- All plenary meetings of the General Assembly and the Security Council, and the Spokesman's daily briefings and press conferences are available as live webcast videos and archived for on-demand viewing anytime
- More than 10,000 video clips are being viewed daily by visitors to the United Nations web site from all over the world. Webcast technology has also allowed us to improve internal communications. The regular town hall meetings that I conduct with all staff of the Department are now webcast to our offices away from Headquarters, so that staff there can view these meetings and participate by e-mailing or telephoning in their questions. This is possibie at no additional cost
- The procurement and installation of a new multimedia electronic news production system, now in its pilot phase for photos and radio, will allow our news producers and photo editors to work from their work stations. We no longer have a traditional photo lab and we will soon stop recording on tape
- And we are using an e-mail alert system for the news, webcasts and photos to place our products directly into the hands of editors, non-governmental organizations, academics and government officials, who will use them to reach out to people in their respective communities. We have also extended the reach of the web to radio, using FTP (file transfer protocol) to make high-quality digital audio files of our radio programmes available to radio stations. Our Sales and Marketing Section is now finalizing the e-commerce site, through which we will make our sales materials available for online purchase.

29. And in keeping with the expressed wishes of Member States, the Department of Public Information, as manager of the United Nations web site, has continued its

efforts to enhance parity among the official languages on the site. The Department has been implementing innovative approaches towards achieving the goal of multilingualism within the context of existing resources. One such approach, as detailed in our report on reorientation, has been the decision to expand the UN News Centre site into all the official languages. The new database platform for the News Centre, developed entirely in-house I might add, enables the latest news items on any specific theme or topic to be automatically available, not only on any part of the United Nations web site, but on any other interested web site as well. I know that web sites of some of your Permanent Missions already have direct links to the UN News Centre, but I would like to alert you that a "breaking news" service is now also available that can bring the latest United Nations headlines right to your page. We shall also be extending this technology, with its greatly enhanced search facility, to other areas of the site, such as press releases.

30. Another innovative step of which we are proud has been our arrangements with universities for pro bono translation of content for the web site. You know of our poverty, our budget cuts, and that our budget circumstances have long been a disadvantage. In addition to the arrangement with the University of Salamanca in Spain, which I reported earlier, agreements are now in place with Shaoxin University in China and Minsk State Linguistic University in Belarus for the translation of material which is then revised and processed for posting on the web site.

31. The Department of Public Information has been encouraging and assisting other departments in the Secretariat in making their information materials available on the United Nations web site in all official languages. Today, the official language sites are growing at a much faster pace than the English site, though I must admit that progress has not been as speedy as we would have wished, for many reasons, resources being only one of them, perhaps the most important still. The opening up of the Official Document System later this year will of course greatly enhance the availability of material in all official languages on the web site.

32. Another area where the Department has introduced changes in response to growing needs is what is now referred to as knowledge management. The in-depth review of library activities submitted for your consideration (A/AC.198/2004/4) discusses the leadership role of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library in this area. With the establishment of the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries, a mechanism has been created through which all the major libraries of the Organization are working together to share resources, minimize duplication of effort and develop common products, common services and common policies. The Steering Committee has so far held four meetings, mainly by videoconference, bringing together all member libraries.

33. As part of this ongoing collaboration, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library provided consultancy expertise to the United Nations Office at Nairobi. The objective was to evaluate the feasibility and the mechanisms for the establishment of a common library at that Office. Since then, the Library of the United Nations Environment Programme has undertaken to operate as a de facto United Nations library in Nairobi, with the material support of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and the United Nations Development Programme there. The next logical step towards giving it a secure administrative footing would be for the General

Assembly to recognize it as a United Nations Library and to approve its funding accordingly.

34. As the "public voice" of the Organization, connecting with the public at large and building partnerships with civil society, non-governmental organizations, educators, students and the private sector in an increasingly integrated fashion is a challenge that remains vital for the Department. The successes of our outreach efforts over the past year — many of which are detailed in the Secretary-General's reorientation report — have not simply been successes in getting our word, or fact, or "message" out to a larger world, but in intimately involving those who constitute that larger world in an informed, passionate debate about the United Nations, its achievements and its failures, as well as its past, its present, its promise.

35. Our outreach to civil society partners, particularly non-governmental organizations, provides many opportunities for partnerships and information-sharing with the 1,400 non-governmental organizations associated with the Department of Public Information, as well as those in consultative status with the United Nations through the Economic and Social Council. We continue to reach out to the educational community at all levels, expanding and strengthening relationships with what I would like — at the risk of causing some discomfort to our interpreters! — to call the "educable" world. Through the Global Teaching and Learning Project, with its online component, the United Nations Cyberschoolbus, we seek to provide exceptional educational resources online and in print to students around the world. And through The UN Works project, the Department has created a multimedia platform that puts a human face on critical global issues and shows how the United Nations can change peoples' lives.

36. Mr. Chairman, in an interview published in the latest issue of the *UN Chronicle*, you had observed that "to know what to ask is to know half the answer in some ways". Although your remarks were in a different context, I can think of no more appropriate phrase to sum up, if I may so call it, the philosophy of our outreach. It reflects the realization that ideas that can compel solutions to the "problems without passports" that distinguish our times must emerge from the enormous reservoir of global thought and creative talent which this Organization must access. And if, through our diverse means of popular as well as targeted outreach, we can spur the imagination to ask the right questions, can the successful inward journey to the right answers be far behind?

37. Later this afternoon, during our interactive dialogue, we shall be able to devote more time to this question and its possible answers, or partial answers. In any case, we know that not only will you ask us questions but you will also question our answers. We look forward to this.

38. Let me now turn to the question of the regionalization of the network of United Nations information centres.

39. During the past year, the Department of Public Information has continued to implement the Secretary-General's proposals for rationalizing information centres by consolidating the network around "regional hubs". His proposals were based on two points. First, that now, perhaps more than ever before, it is essential to create a better understanding of the Organization and to build public support for its work in all parts of the world. At the same time, we no longer have sufficient resources to accomplish this, using the existing scattered arrangements in the field. While each

United Nations information centre is normally expected to provide services to several countries, the fact is that resource constraints often restrict the centres to providing services only within the capital city of their host country. Moreover, as a result of retrenchment exercises mandated by the General Assembly in the 1990s, where a significant number of posts were abolished — and, I might add, where resources were simply not increased and inflation had eroded the operational budgets of each of these centres before the cuts of last year — too many centres are today unable to perform even essential programme functions and are instead reduced to little more than administering themselves.

40. In other words, in the current budgetary climate, in order to have a substantive and efficient field presence, there is simply no option for the Organization but to rationalize the network of information centres around regional hubs. I should emphasize that the goal is certainly not to reduce the information capacity in the countries currently served by United Nations information centres, but rather to reduce the administrative costs required to operate the network, both in terms of staff costs of administrative personnel and the basic operating costs inevitably attached to maintaining a centre, such as rental and maintenance of premises, utilities and security costs. By pooling the scarce resources available to us in a smaller number of strategically located regional centres, we aim to make more efficient use of these resources, while increasing the effectiveness of our information work. At the same time, our aim is to maintain information capacity in each country, ensuring that even where United Nations information centres as such are closed, national information officers are attached to the United Nations country teams.

41. The Department has, in other words, turned to a more strategic approach to its communications in the field. And I do not believe that in our current budgetary environment we can effectively do otherwise.

42. Last year, the General Assembly laid out, in its resolution 58/101 B, a clear sequence of steps to be taken and the Department has followed them. In the resolution, Member States identify the creation of a Western European hub as the first step in this process. I am pleased to inform the Committee that the new Regional United Nations Information Centre for Western Europe, in Brussels, began operations on 1 January 2004, immediately after the region's nine information centres were closed — not without a great deal of difficulty and pain — on 31 December 2003. This modern and fully resourced centre, when fully functional — and I stress it is still in temporary premises without a full complement of staff — this RUNIC will enable the Organization to implement a more robust, coherent and coordinated public information outreach programme in the region. We intend to evaluate this operation and share the findings with you after a reasonable period of time has passed.

43. The second step identified in the resolution is to take a similar cost-cutting approach in other high-cost developed countries — namely Sydney, Tokyo and Washington, D.C. You will no doubt be heartened to learn that the Department has negotiated an agreement with the Government of Australia — and I do want to thank the Government of Australia for its generosity — as a result of which the Sydney Centre is expected to move to rent-free premises in Canberra in the fall of this year. This will release funds to allow the Centre to better fulfil its role as a regional hub covering the countries of the South Pacific. In other words, the idea is not to save

the money we are paying in rent in Sydney, but to use the rental money from Sydney for operational purposes in Canberra. That is the logic we want to apply in the regionalization initiative in the developing countries.

44. I am also pleased to tell you that the Government of Japan, in addition to its generous annual voluntary contribution in support of the programme activities of the United Nations Information Centre-Tokyo, has also agreed to cover the Centre's substantial annual maintenance costs and service charges, in 2005, through extrabudgetary funding. The United Nations Information Centre-Tokyo is located in rent-free premises in the United Nations University building. In Washington, D.C., where the Centre is responsible for important liaison work with various institutions of the host country, we are exploring other means of economizing, including the possibility of occupying smaller and less costly premises in 2005, when the current lease comes up for renewal.

45. The third step set out in resolution 58/101 B is the submission of a progress report on the implementation of regionalization with the objective of applying this initiative in other parts of the world. In this regard, I should like to refer you to the Secretary-General's report on the rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/2004/3), which sets out the proposed strategy and modalities for implementing the initiative in other regions.

46. In considering the proposals to regionalize the United Nations information centres in developing countries, it is important to keep in mind that the objective is not to reduce the resources that are made available for this purpose, but to strengthen the flow and exchange of information. In fact, as a result of the establishment of the regional centre in Brussels, there will be a modest increase in the staff resources available for centres in developing countries, including three D-1 posts and a number of General Service posts. Regrettably, this good news is more than offset by a serious reduction in operational resources following the decision of the General Assembly, in paragraph 30 of its resolution 58/271, to reduce the budgetary allocation to the United Nations information centres by $2 million.

47. The Department of Public Information has consistently taken the view that regionalization is not a cost-cutting exercise, but an exercise in improving the efficiency of our information efforts in the field. We cannot have effective regional hubs if they are not provided with the necessary operational funds, particularly for travel and communications. I therefore request this Committee to urge the General Assembly to support the Department's reform efforts by providing our field offices, especially the regional hubs, with adequate operational resources, rather than reducing them. I do believe that regionalization is the way forward for the reasons that I have explained. But I also believe that if regionalization does not show Member States that we can effectively redirect administrative resources for information purposes, but instead we simply save the administrative resources and show no improvement in our information work, then we will not be able to generate the understanding and the political support so necessary in this Committee, and beyond, for the effective reform changes we are advocating.

48. Our objective, as proposed in the Secretary-General's report, aims to strengthen and improve access to information on the United Nations by people around the world, including, of course, in particular those in developing countries. We recognize the existing lack of access to information and communications technologies in many parts of the developing world, and so the model we are

proposing retains, wherever possible, a physical presence in the countries serviced by the hubs through the posting of information staff in the offices of resident coordinators. I have already initiated discussions with Mark Malloch Brown, the Chairman of the United Nations Development Group and the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, on elaborating the details of the new Department of Public Information field presence so that we can take full advantage of the resident coordinator system and contribute further to the coherence of the United Nations presence in the field.

49. Unlike the model employed in Western Europe, the developing country model would consist not of one large hub, but rather of several smaller hubs. To show how the new model will work, we have indicated in a very preliminary way where regional information centres could be located. The final choice of the locations will be influenced by the views put forward by the Committee on Information and will require extensive consultations with Member States. In doing so, we would emphasize the need for flexibility in adapting the model to the realities of the developing world and the characteristics of each individual region and country. I would encourage the members of the Committee to bear in mind the guidelines and criteria for regionalization contained in annex II to the report when considering the proposed location of the regional hubs.

50. I look forward to hearing the Committee's views as we enter the crucial phase of the process, which envisages the extension of the regional hub initiative to developing countries. We will rely on your guidance as we continue to implement the initiative with the aim of meeting the time frame envisaged by the Secretary-General for completion of the regionalization process over the three-year period that began in 2003.

51. The Department is committed to delivering effective and targeted information programmes. With this end in mind, it has developed — and submitted for your consideration — the proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2006-2007 (A/AC.198/2004/7), which provides an overall orientation for the Department. Delineated by the four subprogrammes, it identifies the expected accomplishments as well as indicators of achievement. Consistent with the culture of evaluation and performance management now instituted throughout the Department, the strategic framework presents a vision as well as a road map, whose sole purpose is to help make the relevance of the work of the United Nations resonate in the lives and daily concerns of people everywhere.

52. In this connection, allow me to draw your attention to rule 104.6 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, and invite you to review the proposed biennial programme plan and to provide your comments to the Secretary-General. As you know, the proposed plan, modified as appropriate, will first be submitted to the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-fourth session, whose recommendations will be transmitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, when it will consider the proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2006-2007.

53. According to an old African proverb, the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time to plant a tree is today. While reform is not, strictly speaking, a tree-planting exercise, the care and attention it requires are no less demanding. The "tree" that we have planted is now two years old; its growth and

longevity will depend not only on the care we provide but also on the support you give us.

54. I know you will have to take a close and hard look at some of the issues on your agenda. Your recommendations will be critical for the Secretary-General's reform process to continue and to ultimately reach its goals. I am looking forward to having a fruitful exchange with delegations on all aspects of the question relating to public information. I firmly believe that you will draw the right conclusions, however difficult or politically challenging they may be. After all, as the great Roman philosopher-writer Seneca once said, it is not because things are difficult that we do not dare, it is because we do not dare that they are difficult.

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